

HB 119

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**he Dismissal of
Professor Ross**

**REPORT OF - - - - -
COMMITTEE OF ECONOMISTS**

*Report of the Committee of Economists on the
Dismissal of Professor Ross from Leland
Stanford Junior University*

The committee appointed at the meeting of the economists in Detroit, December 28, 1900, to enquire into the causes of the dismissal of Professor Ross from Leland Stanford University, have earnestly endeavored to learn the facts of the case. In addition to a careful examination of the statements made in the newspapers, we have asked Professor Jordan for a full and frank statement of the causes which led to Professor Ross's removal, and have obtained the replies printed in the appendix, in which Professor Jordan declines to give specific information in regard to them. We have also in our possession copies of letters bearing upon this case from various persons, including letters from Professor Ross, as well as from President Jordan, not only to Professor Ross, but also to others.

The following facts are, we believe, undisputed:

It is customary for professors in the Leland Stanford University to be reappointed early in May of each year. Professor Ross failed to receive his annual reappointment early in May, 1900. He was, however, reappointed on June 2. On June 5, he handed to President Jordan his resignation as follows:

"Dear Dr. Jordan:—I was sorry to learn from you a fortnight ago that Mrs. Stanford does not approve of me as an economist, and does not want me to remain here. It was a pleasure, however, to learn at the same time of the unqualified terms in which you had expressed to her your opinion of my work and your complete confidence in me as a teacher, a scientist and a man.

While I appreciate the steadfast support you have given me, I am unwilling to become a cause of worry to Mrs. Stanford or of embarrassment to you. I, therefore, beg leave to offer my resignation as professor of sociology, the same to take effect at the close of the academic year, 1900-1901."

This resignation was not acted on until November 12, when it was accepted by President Jordan in the following letter:

"I have waited till now in the hope that circumstances might arise which would lead you to a reconsideration. As this has not been the case, I, therefore, with great reluctance, accept your resignation, to take effect at your own convenience. In doing so I wish to express once more the high esteem in which your work, as a student and a teacher, as well as your character as a man, is held by all your colleagues."

On November 14, Professor Ross authorized the publication in the newspapers of a statement setting forth the causes of his resignation and its acceptance, attributing it to a dissatisfaction felt by Mrs. Stanford with his expressions of opinion on questions of public policy, particularly coolie immigration and municipal ownership of public service corporations. On the following day, President Jordan wrote Professor Ross to the effect that, in view of his published statement, it was desirable that his connection with the University should terminate immediately.

The evidence which we have been able to obtain indicates clearly also the following facts:

(1) The causes which led to the dismissal of Professor Ross existed in May, 1900.

(2) Although the dismissal of Professor Ross may have been occasioned by his published statement of November 14, his resignation was practically forced by the wish of Mrs. Stanford. This fact is distinctly stated in the report of the Alumni Committee of Investigation, which report apparently has the full endorsement of the University authorities.

(3) Mrs. Stanford's wishes in the matter were expressed as early as May, 1900.

(4) The delay in the acceptance of Professor Ross's resignation was due to an effort on the part of

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President Jordan to overcome Mrs. Stanford's objections.

The question in regard to which we have been called upon to express an opinion is: What were the reasons which led Mrs. Stanford to force Professor Ross's resignation?

Two classes of reasons have been alleged:

(1) Dissatisfaction on the part of Mrs. Stanford with Professor Ross's expressions of opinion on questions of economic policy, notably in regard to the free coinage of silver in the campaign of 1896, and more recently in regard to coolie immigration and municipal monopolies.

(2) It has been asserted or suggested that Professor Ross had made statements before his classes reflecting upon Senator Stanford, that he had shown himself selfish and lacking in loyalty to the University, that he was erratic and frequently overstepped the bounds of academic propriety in the manner of giving expression to his opinions, that his publication of November 14th was a violation of confidence, and that there are facts which, if disclosed, would reflect upon his personal character.

While it is, of course, impossible for us definitely to determine what facts, or reports of supposed facts, may have weighed with Mrs. Stanford, the evidence in the possession of the committee seems to justify the following conclusions:

(1) There is no evidence to show that Professor Ross gave occasion for his dismissal by any defect in moral character. On the contrary, President Jordan states in his letter of February 7 to the committee: "No ground exists for any interpretation of his dismissal reflecting on his private character."

(2) There is no evidence to show that Professor Ross gave occasion for his dismissal by incompetence.

On the contrary, President Jordan stated in a letter of May, 1900, that he was "a careful thinker and a patient investigator," "a constant source of strength" to the University and "one of the best teachers, always just, moderate and fair."

(3) There is no evidence to show that Professor Ross gave occasion for his dismissal by any unfaithfulness in the discharge of his duties. On the contrary, President Jordan stated in a letter of May, 1900, that "he has been most loyal, accepting extra work and all kinds of embarrassments without a word of complaint," and that he was "a wise, learned and noble man, one of the most loyal and devoted of all the band" at the University.

(4) There is no evidence to show that in his published statement of November 14 Professor Ross violated any confidence reposed in him. On the contrary, in a letter of December 24, President Jordan states: "I wish after conversation with Dr. Ross to withdraw anything I may have said implying that he had knowingly used confidential material, or in any other way violated personal proprieties in making his statement."

(5) Concerning the point that Professor Ross gave occasion for his dismissal by remarks derogatory to Senator Stanford, your committee finds in a statement by Mr. C. F. Lummis, in *The Land of Sunshine*, dated Christmas, 1900, the following passage:

"The precise words Professor Ross may have used I do not know, but I do know that he has stated in his classes in Stanford many things which his students understood to be reflections on Senator Stanford, and I know, also, that Mrs. Stanford firmly believes that he did slur her husband's memory."

In *The Independent* of February 7, 1901, Mr. Lummis repeats this charge, quoting Mrs. Stanford's reasons for his dismissal: "* * * He has called my husband a thief."

The committee also finds that President Jordan in a letter of November 16, 1900, states:

"Mr. Keesling informs me that he and others of the alumni have heard you in your classes condemn the means by which Mr. Stanford became rich in such a way as to make it clearly a personal reference, and that some time last year Mrs. Stanford was told this by a prominent alumnus, Mr. Crothers, if I understood correctly."

In a letter of the next day, however, President Jordan retracts this by saying: "Mr. Crothers tells me that he has never mentioned the matter in question to Mrs. Stanford. I was not sure that I understood my informant to say so."

Professor Ross, moreover, at the time, unqualifiedly denied all such charges, and insisted that statements to this effect were "a thorough-paced falsehood and a disingenuous attempt to befog the real issue." In another place he says: "The charge from any quarter that I have ever made remarks derogatory to the character of Senator Stanford is false—absolutely without foundation." In a subsequent letter he states: "I have never referred in a derogatory way to Senator Stanford, nor have I reflected upon the manner in which he accumulated his fortune. Both my sincere respect for the Senator and my sense of the proprieties of my position forbade anything of the kind."

Moreover, that this charge could not have been a determining cause in President Jordan's acceptance of Professor Ross's resignation, is shown by the fact that in a letter of November 16, two days after his dismissal, President Jordan says, in reference to these charges: "I never heard anything of the sort before."

(6) There is no evidence to show that in the opinion of the President of the University, Professor Ross, in his utterances on the silver question, on coolie immigration, or on municipal ownership, overstepped the limits of professorial propriety. On the contrary, President Jordan stated in May, 1900, that his remarks on

coolie immigration and on municipal ownership were in accord with the drift of public sentiment on those subjects, and that even on the silver question "he never stepped outside of the recognized rights of a professor."

(7) There is evidence to show:

(a) That Mrs. Stanford's objections to Professor Ross were due, in part at all events, to his former attitude on the silver question, and to his utterances on coolie immigration and on municipal ownership; and

(b) That while the dissatisfaction of Mrs. Stanford due to his former attitude on the silver question antedated his utterances on coolie immigration and municipal ownership, her dissatisfaction was greatly increased by these utterances.

As to (a). This is shown by the fact that President Jordan at first attempted to deter Mrs. Stanford from taking any action for such reasons, stating in a letter of May, 1900: "I feel sure that if his critics would come forth and make their complaints to me in manly fashion I could convince any of them that they have no real ground for complaint." President Jordan, moreover, intimated that to dismiss him for such reasons would be improper in the extreme, for "no graver charge can be made against a University than that it denies its professors freedom of speech."

As to (b). This is shown by the fact that not until immediately after delivery of the coolie immigration speech did Mrs. Stanford force Professor Ross's resignation, as well as by the fact that in a letter of June, 1900, President Jordan stated: "The matter of immigration she (Mrs. Stanford) takes most seriously."

In the same letter, while Mrs. Stanford's objection is declared to be due to the fact that the reputation of the University for serious conservatism is impaired by the hasty acceptance of social and political fads, it is added, that these "local criticisms" which weighed with Mrs.

Stanford "unfortunately are based on chance matters and *obiter dicta*, not at all upon your serious work."

We have not deemed it wise to publish in full the letters upon which we have based our conclusions, but we stand ready to publish them if such a course is necessary to establish the truth in this matter.

We are aware that owing to the failure of President Jordan to give definite replies to all our questions, there may be important facts with which we are unacquainted. On the other hand, we cannot but feel that a refusal to furnish specific information in a case of such importance—in which it is charged that the freedom of speech is at stake—is itself a fact of significance, which, to say the least, is much to be regretted.

All of which is respectfully submitted.

EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN, Professor of Political Economy and Finance, Columbia University.

HENRY W. FARNAM, Professor of Political Economy, Yale University.

HENRY B. GARDNER, Professor of Political Economy, Brown University.

February 20, 1901.

The undersigned have examined the evidence submitted by the above committee, and believe that it justifies the conclusions which they have drawn :

HORACE WHITE, Editor of the *Evening Post*, New York.

JOHN B. CLARK, Columbia University.

HENRY C. ADAMS, University of Michigan.

FRANK W. TAUSSIG, Harvard University.

RICHARD T. ELY, University of Wisconsin.

SIMON N. PATTEN, University of Pennsylvania.

RICHMOND MAYO-SMITH, Columbia University.

JOHN C. SCHWAB, Yale University.

SIDNEY SHERWOOD, Johns Hopkins University.

FRANKLIN H. GIDDINGS, Columbia University.

WILLIAM J. ASHLEY, Harvard University.

CHARLES H. HULL, Cornell University.

DAVIS R. DEWEY, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

HENRY C. EMERY, Yale University.

HENRY R. SEAGER, University of Pennsylvania.

APPENDIX.

December 30, 1900.

PRESIDENT JORDAN, *Leland Stanford Junior University,*
Palo Alto, Cal.:

DEAR SIR:—In behalf of a considerable number of economists, recently assembled in Detroit and much interested in the resignation of Professor Ross from the Leland Stanford University, we venture to address you on the subject. We understand from the public prints as well as from other sources, that Professor Ross was asked to sever his connection with the University owing to the loss of confidence in him by Mrs. Stanford, and that this loss of confidence was due primarily to the opinions expressed by him in a lecture on the subject of coolie immigration as well as to incidental remarks on the problem of municipal ownership.

May we inquire whether, as it has been alleged in some of the Eastern journals, there are any other reasons than those mentioned for the resignation of Professor Ross, and may we hope that, if such other reasons exist, you may be disposed to communicate them to us? Many university men have been led to believe that in this case the legitimate freedom of thought without which no progress in science is possible has been discouraged. As this is a matter which concerns not a single university, but the interests of scholarship all over the country, we believe that we are not overstepping the bounds of propriety in asking information which will enable university teachers to form a just opinion on the merits of the case.

We desire to add that Dr. Ross is neither the instigator of this letter nor aware of its contents.

Very truly yours,

EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN,
Columbia University.

HENRY W. FARNAM,
Yale University.

HENRY B. GARDNER,
Brown University.

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY,

Stanford University, Cal., Jan. 7, 1901.

Prof. EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN, *Columbia University,*
New York City.

MY DEAR SIR:—In response to your kind letter of December 30th, permit me to say that in view of the importance of the matter I have referred the contents of your letter to a committee of three of our professors, Vice-President J. C. Branner, Dr. J. M. Stillman and Dr. C. H. Gilbert. They are in possession of the facts and are at liberty to answer any questions which your committee may desire to ask. For reasons which will readily appear it has not been deemed advisable for us to state the reasons why Dr. Ross was dismissed. His statement to the press does not assign any of the true reasons.

Very truly yours,

DAVID JORDAN,
President.

LELAND STANFORD JUNIOR UNIVERSITY,

Jan. 14, 1901.

Professor EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN.

Professor HENRY W. FARNAM.

Professor HENRY B. GARDNER.

DEAR SIR:—

Your letter of December 30th addressed to President Jordan has been referred by him to us for reply.

In your letter you say: "We understand from the public prints as well as from other sources that Professor Ross was asked to sever his connection with the University owing to loss of confidence in him by Mrs. Stanford, and that this loss of confidence was due primarily to the opinions expressed by him in a lecture on the subject of coolie immigration as well as to incidental remarks on the problem of municipal ownership."

In reply we beg to say that the dissatisfaction of the University management with Professor Ross antedated his utterances on the topics you refer to. His removal was not due primarily to what he published, said or thought in regard to coolie immigration or in regard to municipal ownership.

We can assure you furthermore that in our opinion his removal cannot be interpreted as an interference with freedom of speech or thought within the proper and reasonable meaning of that expression.

These statements are made with a full knowledge of the facts of the case.

Very truly yours,

J. C. BRANNER,

J. M. STILLMAN,

C. H. GILBERT.

January 30, 1901.

PRESIDENT JORDAN,
Leland Stanford University,
Palo Alto, California:

DEAR SIR:—

We beg to acknowledge receipt of your letter of January 7th, as well as the letter of your committee of three, of January 14th.

You state in your letter that you are ready to answer all questions. May we venture to put the following:

1.—In the committee's letter of January 14th, it is stated that the "dissatisfaction of the University Management with Professor Ross antedated his utterances on the topics you refer to." How can this dissatisfaction of the University management be made to agree with the statement of the President, speaking for himself and the faculty, and quoted in the public prints of November 14th as follows:—

a.—Extract from a letter from Professor Ross to President Jordan: "It was a pleasure, however, to learn from you of the unqualified terms in which you have expressed to her (Mrs. Stanford) your high opinion of my work and your complete confidence in me as a teacher, a scientist, and a man."

b.—Quotation from a letter from President Jordan to Professor Ross: "I wish to express once more the high esteem in which your work as a student and a teacher, as well as your character as a man, is held by your colleagues."

2.—In your letter of January 7th, you say—"His (Professor Ross's) statement to the press does not assign any of the true reasons." If the speeches on coolie immigration and municipal ownership did not constitute any of the reasons for his dismissal, why was the dissatisfaction, which in your judgment antedated these speeches, not manifested until immediately after the delivery of the same? Why was the reappointment so dubious and tardy

while Professor Ross had no intimation of his possible non-appointment till May 18?

3.—In saying that Professor Ross does not assign any of the true reasons for his dismissal, do we understand you to deny the truth of Professor Ross's published statement, containing quotations from your remarks to him:

- a.*—That "he (Dr. Jordan) had heard from her (Mrs. Stanford) just after my address on coolie immigration."
- b.*—That "quite unexpectedly to him (President Jordan) Mrs. Stanford had shown herself greatly displeased with me (Professor Ross)."
- c.*—That "he (President Jordan) was profoundly distressed at the idea of dismissing a scientist for utterances within the scientist's own field."
- d.*—That "he (President Jordan) made earnest representations to Mrs. Stanford."

4.—What are the real reasons for the dismissal of Dr. Ross? In your letter of January 7th, you say: "For reasons which will readily appear, it has not been deemed advisable for us to state the reasons why Dr. Ross was dismissed." Will you pardon us for saying that we fail readily to recognize any such reasons? If the reasons are that you fear to injure the personal reputation of Professor Ross, may we venture to suggest that nothing that you could do would be more calculated to injure Dr. Ross than the insinuation that there are some secret reasons which cannot be divulged. It is just because some such innuendoes have been printed in the papers that our committee addressed itself to you, in order to ascertain the true state of affairs.

While we regret to prolong this correspondence, you will readily see that unless we can give the members of the American Economic Association some explicit reasons for Professor Ross's dismissal other than those assigned by him, they will naturally adhere to the opinion

based upon the statements first made in the public press. A mere denial of the truth of the statements made by him will not be apt to satisfy gentlemen who are not willing to believe that any of the parties concerned in the question would intentionally make a false statement, and facts alone will enable them to reconcile assertions that would otherwise seem contradictory. It is for that reason that we venture again to express the hope that a more explicit answer may be given to our questions.

Very truly yours,

EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN,
HENRY W. FARNAM,
HENRY B. GARDNER.

LELAND STANFORD UNIVERSITY, CAL.,

Feb. 7, 1901.

Professors

EDWIN R. A. SELIGMAN,
HENRY W. FARNAM,
HENRY B. GARDNER.

GENTLEMEN :—

Your letter of January 30th is at hand asking further information as to the reasons for the dismissal of Professor Ross. When I expressed my willingness to answer further questions I did not mean to indicate that I would enter into any circumstantial description of events leading to or following from Professor Ross's dismissal. Nor do I consider it expedient or proper to go into a discussion of extracts from my letters or conversations or of my statements or alleged statements, or those of others, as published in the newspapers. There are, however, certain assurances which it is within the privilege of the public to ask, and which it is my desire to furnish, that the

public may be assisted in forming a judgment as to the position of the University upon important questions. It seems to me that I shall answer these questions best by certain plain statements which involve the important facts concerning the University. It will be necessary for you to assume my knowledge of all the facts, also that the interpretation herewith presented is authoritative from the University standpoint.

First: Professor Ross was not dismissed on account of his views on Oriental immigration nor on account of his opinions on any economic question.

Second: Professor Ross was dismissed because in the judgment of the University authorities he was not the proper man for the place he held. The responsibility for the correctness of this judgment belongs to the University authorities and to them alone.

Third: No ground exists for any interpretation of his dismissal reflecting on his private character, of which your letter seems to imply a fear.

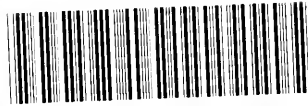
Fourth: The judgment that Professor Ross was not the proper man for the place he held is not incompatible with my appreciation of many good qualities he possesses, nor with my wishes or efforts at any time to further his prospects. I have been neither ignorant of his professional shortcomings nor inappreciative of his good qualities. Of such appreciation Professor Ross has himself adduced several expressions from my letters.

In the hope that you may find in the above a substantial answer to the questions involved in your inquiries, I remain,

Very truly yours,

DAVID L. JORDAN.

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